

Children's Coalition for Online Safety

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE CHILDREN'S ONLINE SAFETY REGIME

April 2025



As organisations advocating for a safer and healthier online world, we believe that the Online Safety Act is an integral first step in ensuring that tech companies are held accountable for the proliferation of illegal content, activity and harm to children which has characterised our digital age. Since it passed into law, we have engaged closely with Ofcom and the Government to offer our support and resources to help build a regulatory regime that delivers on promises made to children, parents and survivors during its passage.

We welcome the work done to deliver enforcement plans ahead of schedule, and efforts to tackle child sexual abuse online. However, it is clear from the outpouring of concern and national discussion around the themes explored in the show *Adolescence* that we need more than the standardisation of places of good practice.

Ofcom's codes of practice – the foundations of the regimes – must, at the very least, address known online harm to children. Despite calls from experts, civil society and parliamentarians for it to be strengthened, the Illegal Harms Codes of Practice, which came into force in March 2025, was watered down from its draft proposals following pressure from the tech industry. Further, we have been concerned by reports that the regulation could be further watered down in international trade negotiations. We

support the Government's commitment to boosting innovation in the UK to grow our economy, but this must not come at the expense of children's safety.

With the Protection of Children Code of Practice due to be published imminently, we are calling for a firm commitment from Government and decisive action from Ofcom to grasp the opportunity to make a meaningful difference to children's safety in the UK.

1. Set high expectations for online safety

The codes of practice must set ambitious standards that go beyond codification of existing industry practices. "Tick-box" solutions are insufficient – Ofcom must focus on measurable outcomes that demonstrably enhance children's online safety. In particular, they must reflect the requirement for safety by design to be delivered throughout the platform, incentivise tech companies to innovate in the name of children's safety by removing safe harbour provisions, and require age-appropriate safeguards.

We urge Ofcom and the Government to adopt the Children's Coalition's recommendations to robustly protect children online.

2. Accelerate the development of future codes of practice

We welcome that Ofcom has met its deadlines for the publication of the codes ahead of schedule, but the delay between producing future codes will not keep pace with emerging threats, or address all of the known and ongoing harm to children. We must see future codes of practice brought forward within twelve months, with equal weight given to the evidence from civil society and views of industry through consultation.

3. Establish strong oversight mechanisms

The online safety regime must be future-proof and responsive to the concerns of Parliament, and the public who use these services. The Government should establish a Joint Committee on Digital Regulation to harness the expertise and concern of parliamentarians to deliver meaningful accountability to decisions made by Ofcom.

Against a backdrop of a constantly changing online world and the growing concerns of children and their parents, it is essential we have in place a robust regulatory foundation which is innovative and agile. Ofcom's approach to date has been to standardise current practice which does not go far enough to keep children safe. The Government and Ofcom must work together and commit to defending and strengthening this crucial regime in order to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online.

Signed:

5Rights Foundation
NSPCC
Molly Rose Foundation
Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH)
Barnardo's
Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)
Anti-Bullying Alliance
Marie Collins Foundation
Lucy Faithfull Foundation
Childnet
End Violence Against Women (EVAW) Coalition
UK Safer Internet Centre (UKSIC)
South West Grid for Learning (SWGfL)
Clean Up The Internet
Every Child Protected Against Trafficking (ECPAT) UK
Centre to End All Child Exploitation (CEASE)
Breck Foundation
R;pple Suicide Prevention
Coram Life Education
Maeve Walsh, Director, Online Safety Act Network
Sue Jones, Head of Operations, Ditch the Label
Greg Childs, Director, Children's Media Foundation
The Bereaved Families for Online Safety
Ruth Moss
Amanda and Stuart Stephens
Lorin LaFave
Adele Walton
Ellen Roome
Lisa Kenevan
Mariano Janin
Alice Hendy MBE
Hollie Dance
Ian Russell
Liam Walsh
Esther Ghey
Mark and Ros Dowey